

all conditions from the President of the United States to the beggar in his rags, of all ages and of both sexes, for I should judge one-third were females."⁸

Although primarily providing an arena for male socializing in societies that lacked public assembly halls and theatres, taverns also served as the venues for entertainments that drew women and even children. Dances and balls, theatrical troupes, musical groups, and traveling performers all brought townspeople to the taverns. Taverns in Georgetown, Washington, and Easton, for example, served as the settings for dancing assemblies, to which the gentlemen of the town subscribed with the ladies as their invited guests. Samuel Davidson in the 1780s paid not only his own subscription but also that of Pierre Charles L'Enfant, creator of the capital's street plan. Davidson eventually wrote off the expense, noting in his account book, "knowing you to be a pitiful dirty fellow and very poor, I give up the debt." During the winter season, assemblies would be held as frequently as once a week. Gentlemen who did not know how to dance could attend Mr. Curley's dancing school, receiving twenty-four lessons for six dollars a quarter. Those who could not assemble during the day could take part in evening classes for four dollars.⁹

The long room at Mrs. Doyle's tavern in Georgetown in 1795 served as the setting for Mr. O'Duhigg's dancing classes but was the auditorium for musical performances as well. In May a chamber music concert followed by a ball was held there, while the following month witnessed a harp concert, again followed by a ball; tickets for both performances were one dollar each.¹⁰ Theatrical performances attracted audiences more frequently than did musical evenings. In 1794 the Maryland Company, the troupe of William McGrath and his wife, settled in Georgetown for the winter season. A typical evening offered a performance of *Richard II*, an address by Mr. McGrath, an interval of hornpipe dancing, a song by a Mrs. Fitzgerald, and a two-act comedy. The company was back in Georgetown in the summer of 1795, offering similar programs at the same price of seventy-five cents a ticket.¹¹

Slack Wire Dancing and Other Diversions

Theatrical companies and musical concerts were not the only evening entertainments available to residents of the region's towns. As new settlements were formed and grew in the aftermath of independence, they encouraged the appearance of traveling troupes of entertainers, who could now be assured of finding audiences as they made their way through the countryside. One such performer was John Rannie, a ventriloquist who announced that he would appear on June 1, 1803 in Solomon Lowe's "large room" in Easton, with magic, knife swallowing, and "ground and lofty tumbling" as well as ventriloquism. In August he respectfully informed "the ladies and gentlemen of Washington and Georgetown that he has arrived for the first time in this place and intends displaying his ventriloquistic powers." In February of the following year, he